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## African evangelical pastors make human sacrifices for magical rituals

January 16, 2008

Monrovia - The African Christianities adhering in their rituals to black magic practices have not secreted their alliance with African pagans. As an evangelical pastor described the atrocities he and his men committed during the Liberian civil war, including magical rituals that involved slaughtering children and eating their hearts, one Christian organization describes the African Christians as "totally pagans who lack any basic enlightenment and teachings of the bible despite many efforts made by Western missionaries to have Christianity books and literatures translated into the African languages.

Joshua Milton Blahyi spared no details on Tuesday as he told Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of his years with one of the most feared militias of the war.

Dressed in an immaculate suit, Blahyi, 37, said it was for the TRC to decide whether he should be given an amnesty or prosecuted.

"I am willing to go to court if necessary," he said. "And I will repeat just what I said here."

*La Civiltà Cattolica* expresses this in its own words: "That some customs and religious observances of the early Christians were closely related to certain pagan practices and ways is known to all scholars nowadays. They were practices too dear to the people, customs too deeply rooted and intertwined in the public and private life of the ancient world. The mother church i.e. Roma Catholic, did not believe that she had to uproot them; rather, by transforming them in a Christian sense, raising them to new lifestyles, as to win to herself without uproar the souls of both the masses and the cultured."

According to *La Civiltà Cattolica* one well-known example of the adoption of a pagan festivity is, of course, that of Christmas. December 25 was, in fact, the date on which the ancient Romans observed the *dies natalis Solis Invicti*, that is, "the birthday of the invincible sun."

The tale the Liberian evangelical pastor told was a horrifying one.

In the days of Liberia's first civil war (1989-1997), he had led fighters from the feared ULIMO - the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy - that backed the then president Samuel Doe.

It was Doe's 1990 assassination that sparked the orgy of violence that engulfed the country for most of that decade.

During the civil war Blahyi, known as "General Butt Naked", said he led a group of young soldiers who fought naked while under the influence of drugs. They were notorious for their cruelty and use of magic rituals.

A member of the Krahn ethnic group, Blahyi told how he had been initiated into a secret society at the age of 11 and became a traditional priest. His task became to protect all members of his ethnic group.

At the time, he said, he had magical powers that made him invisible.

"Having a special power, I was always a distance ahead of the rest of the fighters when we were going to the front. I used to capture a town first and then I call the rest of the group to clean up," he said.

Before an audience of about 300 people at the hearing, he recalled the atrocities he committed to

maintain his magical powers.

"Any time we captured a town, I had to make a human sacrifice. They bring to me a living child that I slaughter and take the heart off to eat it."

He did not know how many people they killed, he said. "But for what I did, it is not less than twenty thousands," he added, breaking down in tears.

The hall, which earlier had rung to shouts of outrage at his account, fell silent.

The turning point for him came in 1996, he said.

"A lady offered me her child for my sacrifice. After cutting up the child I divided the heart among my boys and myself.

"The blood of the child was still on my hand when Jesus appeared to me and asked me to stop being a slave."

It was this experience, he said, that prompted his religious conversion and his life since then, travelling the country preaching his version of the Christian message.

Blayhi had come to the TRC hearings of his own initiative. "I was told that TRC can recommend amnesty or prosecution," he said. But he said he is ready to face trial if need be.

The TRC, which has been holding hearings for a week now, is based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in South Africa to catalogue the crimes - and help heal the wounds - of the Apartheid era.

The Liberian commission has a brief to shed light on crimes committed during 14 years of brutal civil war that ended in 2003.

The public hearings in Monrovia, which are being broadcast live on TV and state radio, are expected to last until the end of July.

In the Netherlands meanwhile, the trial of Charles Taylor, the former warlord and ex-president of Liberia, continues at the war crimes tribunal in the Hague.

Taylor who overthrew Doe in the Christmas 1989 rebellion that sparked the years of violence, is accused of crimes against humanity in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

African Christians using human bodies as sacrifices in the pagan rituals is not uncommon. Last year, after long turning a blind eye to ritual crimes within its borders, Gabon came under pressure to drag the morbid practice out of the shadows and do away with it for good of the country where ritual "kidnappings, confinements, mutilations, assassinations and desecrations of graves are commonplace.

The crimes of these pagans associated called themselves evangelists are consistent with ritual killings, which usually involve the removal of the victim's body parts for a potion concocted by a witchdoctor on behalf of a client who wants, say, to win a business deal or secure good luck.

For instance in Nigerian police usually search for suspected ritual killers after finding three decapitated male corpses dumped on a busy intercity motorway last month when the three bodies, whose hands were also missing, were found near a bus stop at the Ibadan end of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway in the southwestern state of Oyo..

"We suspect the men were killed for ritual because their heads and hands were severed," a police spokesperson said by phone from Ibadan, about 100km north of the commercial hub of Lagos. No arrests have yet been made, he added. Relatives of the dead were reported in local newspapers as saying that the victims were last seen in Ibadan with local evangelical groups a day earlier in Lagos.

Killing for ritual is common in Africa's most populous nation, where some Christian evangelists claim they can make people instant millionaires by offering human organs as sacrifices to pagan Christian tribal deities.

The trade in human body parts is a lucrative racket for criminal gangs in the oil exporting nation, where two-thirds of people live on less than a dollar a day.

Last Christmas in south Africa, six people were arrested following the murder of three family members near Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape according to SABC radio news reports.

The arrested people allegedly hacked to death a 70-year-old woman, her daughter aged 56, and a grandson they accused of witchcraft. The murders were carried out on Wednesday night after the three

were kept captive for four hours, Eastern Cape police spokesman Captain Zamukulungisa Jozana said earlier.

The man mauled to death by a pride of lions at the Krugersdorp Game Reserve on the West Rand the the owner of the reserve and said to have been punished by witches. One Captain Joseph Mogoai identified the victim as Dirk Brink, 58 was said to have been killed by power of witchcraft. Brink died after the lions attacked him shortly after 12.30pm. Police were baffled by the incident.

"In Ghana - for example - some people secretly carry out the abominable practice of human sacrifices, putting in their orders from their air-conditioned offices ... so as to promote a vulgar professional ascension," said one Accra newspaper.

"As we clamour for Christianity liberty and democracy we cannot accept that some people get away with killing another human being just so they can feel more at ease," the paper said.

While the practice is most prevalent in Africa, the horrors of ritual killings were brought home to Europeans when a young boy's headless, limbless torso washed up in the Thames in London in 2001. The case stunned the nation for months and triggered a massive investigation.

The boy, dubbed Adam by police and thought to be about five or six-years-old and of west African origin, was never identified. But police said his death - his throat was cut and his head and limbs sliced off with surgical precision - bore all the signs of a ritual killing.

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